Facial Recognition Training: Improving Intelligence Collection by Soldiers

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"In combat, you don't rise to the occasion; you sink to the level of your training." - Anonymous

Collection Issues

As intelligence collection is increasingly becoming the responsibility of the individual Soldier, measures must be taken to increase the effectiveness and reliability of the collector. One of the issues encountered overseas is the need to positively identify a subject (whether a suspect or person of interest) by facial features. This means that a Soldier needs to be able to look at a picture and be able to identify that subject by merely looking at them. There have been great advances in biometric technology, but on patrol a Soldier cannot use a device as quickly as simply looking at the subject.

Why is Facial Recognition Difficult?

Soldiers are trained to constantly scan for threats. If someone is going to kill you they are going to use their hands, therefore Soldiers are focused on a person's hands. The next threat is what you can't see, so Soldiers focus on the background. This necessary process makes it difficult for the Soldier to identify facial features of surrounding people. This means the Soldier has to make a conscious decision to look at a person's face. Then, he has to be able to recall it with certainty at a later time or date.

As the military is increasingly acting in Law Enforcement-type roles, it is important for the Soldier to identify suspects or persons of interest. Lethal and non-lethal targeting is very

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important in counterinsurgency (COIN) operations. The decision makers need to know that their target has been positively identified. The Army is recognizing in COIN the intelligence flow is more bottom-up then top down. [i]

Why Train Soldiers in Facial Recognition?

Training that forces a Soldier to memorize and recall data collected in real world scenarios makes the Soldier more aware of details. This Soldier begins to consciously focus on his surroundings, therefore improving situational awareness. This type of training will make the Soldier a more reliable collector improving the overall quality of intelligence gathered.

How to Train Facial Recognition

The Army has begun a program called Every Soldier a Sensor (ES2). ES2 trains Soldiers to pay attention to details and answer specific questions about their scenario and the surrounding environment.[ii] These scenarios can be as simple as looking at a photo and asked to recall details or live patrol simulations. At the Military Intelligence Basic Officer Leadership Course (MIBOLC), all new Military Intelligence Officers participate in a simulated patrol through a mock Iraqi village. During the debriefing, each squad is asked to report their findings about what they observed and the relationship between Coalition Forces and the Iraqi Village.

Soldiers from NIIBOLC conducting a simulated patrol through a mock Iraqi village during an ES2 exercise.

Photo courtesy of 2LT Jason Sweeney

Keep in Memory (KIMs) Games are a great way to improve the recollection of details. A popular method for KIMs is having the subject examine a picture for several minutes. After that time, remove the photo and ask the subject specific questions about minute details. This training improves the soldier's "eye for details."

Although the Army has made great strides in trying to expose Soldiers to ES2, facial recognition exercises have not been integrated into the exercise. A simple method to combine KIMs and facial recognition is to add a photo lineup. A subject would be allowed to study a photo lineup of potential targets for several minutes. Then, the subject would conduct an activity used a distracter. Physical training is a great distraction activity. The idea is this activity

represents the time between when a Soldier views a lineup and when they actually are looking for the target. Word problems can also be used in substitution of physical training.

After the distracter activity, the subject would then be asked to study the primary observation exercise for several minutes. After the time has elapsed, the subject would be asked to recall specific details pertaining to the entire photo in the primary observation exercise. An example of these types of questions are: How many locals are wearing glasses? Who is wearing a brown shirt? What is the model of the vehicle pictured? Etc. Then, they would be asked if they recognized any target(s) from the lineup in the photo.

The solutions would then be announced after the exercise, giving the Soldier a sense of what they need to improve. These exercises can be altered to give the subject more or less time viewing the photos depending on the amount of experience of the soldier. Ideally, over time the subject should have less time to study the photos and more time on the distracter activities.

Basic Facial Recognition Training
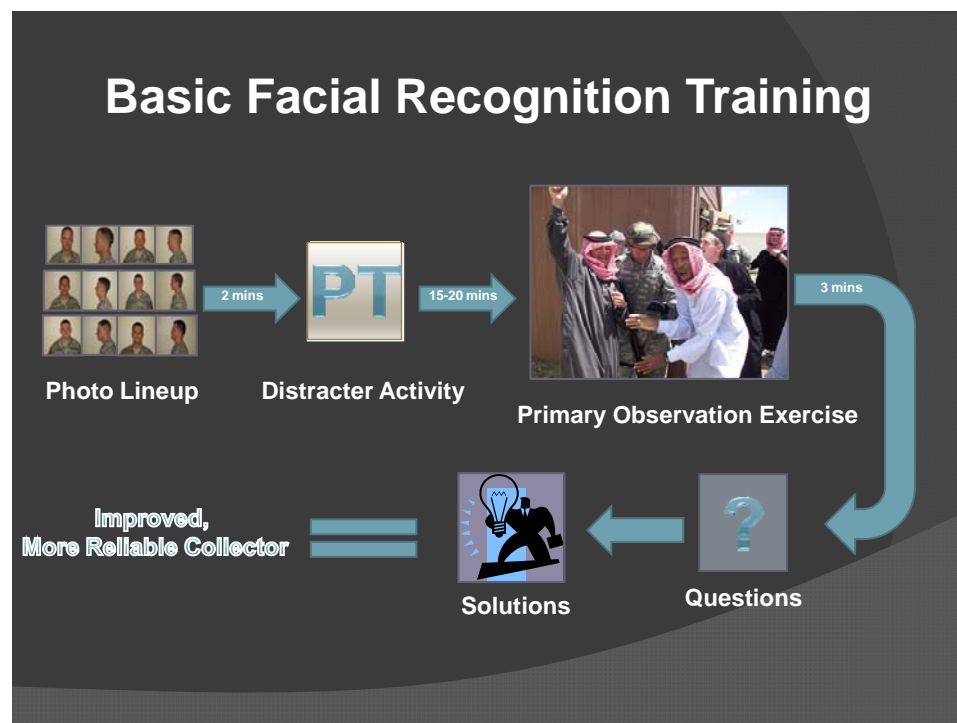
Implementation

As with any activity in the Army, there is limited time in a training schedule to conduct training not seen as mission essential. As previously stated, I would argue that facial recognition training is mission essential. This program can be incorporated into physical training. Ideally, facial recognition training should be conducted once a week or at least twice a month. This training can be implemented at any level, from Corps level to Squad level. There are resources on the Intelligence Knowledge Network that an individual Soldier can receive facial recognition training on their own.

Summary

Facial recognition training is another tool to teach Soldiers to appreciate their surroundings and become better collectors. With this added awareness, the individual Soldier may possess critical information that is invaluable to the Commander and leads to the success of a mission or campaign. With the added benefit of being more cognizant of their surroundings including threats, there is no practical reason why facial recognition training should not be incorporated to the ES2 program and utilized throughout all units in the Army.

Want More Information?

The Intelligence Knowledge Network (https://icon.army.mil/) contains many tools to improve collection among Soldiers and Military Intelligence professionals. Click on the *Every Soldier a Sensor (ES2)* link to access videos, KIMs Games, and Facial Recognition Training.
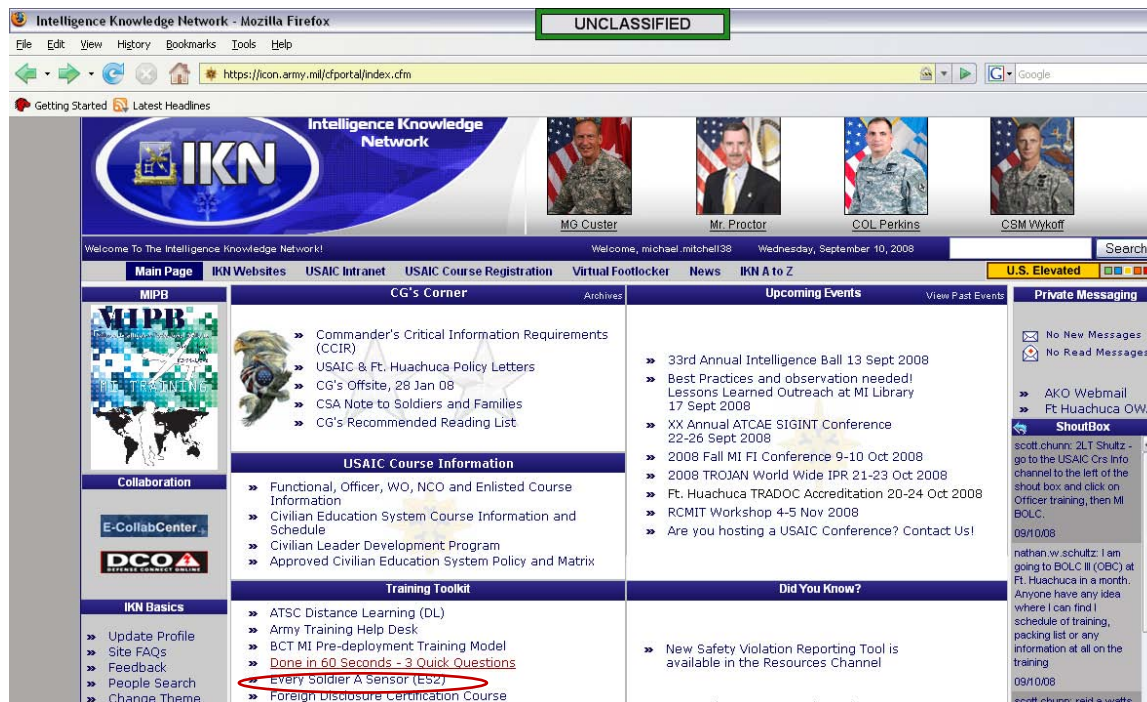
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i FM 3-24. *Counterinsurgency.* 3-123. 2006.
ii Intelligence Knowledge Network. *https://icon.army.mil*. 2008.